

# MRSA Information for Schools and Teachers



## ✓ What is MRSA?

- MRSA stands for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* (or Staph) are bacteria that are commonly found on skin surfaces of most people. This strain is resistant to commonly-prescribed antibiotics such as penicillin, amoxicillin, and cephalosporins.
- About 1 in every 3 people carries some kind of Staph (not all Staph are MRSA) in their nose or on their skin. About 1 to 5 in every 100 people carries MRSA in their nose or on their skin and are not sick. Most of these “carriers” do not know that they carry MRSA (this is not a rare condition).
- MRSA was first identified over 40 years ago (this is not a new problem).

## ✓ What does MRSA infection look like?

- The most common types of infection caused by MRSA are skin infections such as abscesses, pustules, or boils that appear red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These infections can also look like a spider bite. They usually occur in the following areas:
  - Broken skin, such as cuts and scrapes;
  - Places with hair, such as back of neck, chest, groin, armpit, and under beards or moustaches; and
  - The diaper area of young children.
- Serious infections, such as pneumonia, blood, or bone infections, are rare in healthy people.

## ✓ How is MRSA spread?

- There are 5 “C” factors that can contribute to spread of MRSA infection:
  - CONTACT – frequent skin-to-skin contact with a person who is infected;
  - COMPROMISED SKIN – breaks in the skin allow the germs to enter more easily;
  - CONTAMINATED ITEMS and SURFACES – for example towels and shared athletic equipment;
  - Lack of CLEANLINESS – such as students not showering after athletic activities, or not washing hands regularly; and
  - CROWDING – germs spread more easily in close quarters.
- These 5 factors are common in schools and dormitories.

## ✓ How is a MRSA infection treated?

- People with a MRSA infection should seek medical care for treatment. A provider will often drain the infection and may give you antibiotics. It is important to take all of your antibiotics as prescribed.

## ✓ **How can I protect myself?**

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Shower immediately after exercising;
- Cover all cuts and scrapes with a clean, dry bandage until healed; and
- Don't share items that come into contact with bare skin (such as towels or razors).
- Athletic equipment:
  - Don't share headgear, body pads etc.;
  - Be sure that exercise equipment is sanitized after use;
  - Use clothing or towels as a barrier on shared equipment such as weight-training benches; and
  - Make sure that large surfaces such as wrestling mats are cleaned and disinfected regularly.

## ✓ **Should parents tell the school when their child has a MRSA infection?**

- Consult with your school about their policy for notification of skin infections.

## ✓ **What should schools do if a student has a MRSA infection?**

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
- If a student has a MRSA infection:
  - The infected area must be covered by a clean, dry bandage;
  - They should not pick at the infection or remove the bandage; and
  - They should wash their hands frequently.
- If the infection site is too large to be covered by a bandage or clothing, or if the student is unable or unwilling to leave the bandage on the area, then it may be appropriate to exclude the student from school and/or sporting activities until they are no longer infectious.
- Lesions should be considered infectious until healed, regardless of length of treatment with antibiotics.
- If the student is an athlete, please see the information specific for athletes and coaches, located on our website.

## ✓ **What if a classmate has a MRSA infection?**

- Examine your child to look for signs of an active skin infection. Look for skin that is red, hot, and swollen, which may be draining pus or fluid.
  - If you see signs of infected skin, you should seek medical care for your child.
  - If you do not see signs of infected skin, talk to your child about the importance of hygiene (frequent handwashing, showers immediately after exercising, and not using others' towels or other personal items). Medical care and antibiotics are not needed.

### ✓ **Should schools close because of a MRSA infection?**

- School officials should consult with local and/or state public health officials when deciding to close schools for any communicable disease. It is not necessary to close schools because of a MRSA infection in a student. MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as handwashing and covering infections with a bandage.

### ✓ **Should schools be cleaned or disinfected because of a MRSA infection?**

- If a student with MRSA had an uncovered or poorly-covered infected wound, the surfaces that came into contact with the infection should be cleaned and disinfected.
- Use detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants to clean and disinfect surfaces.
  - A listing of cleaners effective against MRSA can be found at:  
<http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>
  - Be sure to read the instruction labels on these cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.
  - Do not use environmental cleaners to treat the infections.

### ✓ **Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?**

- We all have bacteria on our skin all of the time. These skin bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a cause of skin infections. Fortunately, serious skin infections are very rare.
- Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection. When a MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse and local public health official should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents, and staff should be notified.

### ✓ **Advice for school teachers and nurses:**

- If you see children with open draining wounds or infections, refer the child to the school nurse.
  - The parents/guardians should be notified and it should be recommended that the child be taken to a licensed health care provider for diagnosis and treatment.
  - Nurses should wear gloves when caring for non-intact skin or possible infections, and should wash their hands after removing the gloves.
- Remind students about hand hygiene before eating and after using the bathroom.